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The Arc San Francisco Brings Issues Facing People with Disabilities to the White House
President Obama Tells Disability Community “I’ve Got Your Back”

Washington, DC – On Friday, 150 leaders of The Arc, including Dr. Glenn Motola from The Arc San Francisco, met with senior White House officials at a Community Leaders Briefing to ask questions and discuss issues facing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). The session, held exclusively for The Arc, included an unannounced visit from President Barack Obama. The President spoke of his commitment to people with disabilities saying, “I’ve got your back.”

The appearance by the President was the highlight of the day for many attendees, along with the opportunity to interact with high level government officials about how they can support people with I/DD to live in the community. Over the course of the day, leaders of chapters of The Arc were briefed on topics ranging from Medicaid to education to community living and employment for people with I/DD. Many of the speakers, including President Obama, referenced the impact advocates made during budget negotiations to protect Medicaid, and encouraged The Arc and others to continue these efforts.

Another unannounced speaker was White House Chief of Staff Jack Lew, who reiterated the President’s opposition to turning Medicaid into a block grant. He also took questions from the audience, including Barbara Coppens, a member of the national board of directors of The Arc and a self-advocate who took the opportunity to speak about the importance of self-advocacy by people with disabilities.

“I tell other self-advocates – you’ve got to get out there and advocate for yourself because you can’t rely on other people to make change for you,” said Coppens to Chief of Staff Jack Lew.

The Arc San Francisco gets kudos from HUD official

The day-long Disability Policy event included senior level administration officials from the president’s cabinet including Cecilia Muñoz, Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, Carol Galante, Acting Assistant Secretary - Federal Housing Administration Commissioner, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Cindy Mann, Deputy Administrator, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; Robert Gordon, Executive Associate Director, Office of Management and Budget; and Tom Perez, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Department of Justice, all whom emphasized the President’s commitment to providing services and supports to Americans with developmental disabilities.

Carol Galante, Acting Assistant Secretary - Federal Housing Administration Commissioner, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) made special mention of The Arc San Francisco

and the successful effort to bring more affordable housing and support online through a partnership with Mercy Housing.

Said Dr. Glenn Motola, CEO, The Arc San Francisco, "The recent award of federal funding for two new housing sites in our city is a reflection of the administration's alignment with our goals: to bring safe, supported, affordable housing to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities so they can live fully in our community. This partnership leverages the housing development expertise of Mercy Housing with our experience in providing the independent living supports our constituents need to be successful," said Motola.

After a tour of the East Wing of the White House, advocates from The Arc took part in policy breakout sessions that allowed for more detailed discussions on certain issue areas, like community living, family caregiving, education, and Medicaid. The purpose of these briefings was to allow White House and administration officials to engage in a dialogue with leaders of The Arc about how government policies affect the lives of people with I/DD and impact their ability to live full, independent lives. Given the Department of Education's announcement yesterday to allow ten states waivers from some of the No Child Left Behind law requirements, the education session with Alexa Posny, Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, was incredibly timely, as were meetings with representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Justice, Administration on Aging, and the White House Domestic Policy Council.



For over 60 years, The Arc San Francisco has been the premier advocate and service provider for 550 clients with Down syndrome, autism and other developmental disabilities in San Francisco and San Mateo counties, advancing self-determination, dignity and quality of life through employment, education, independent living support and housing plus recreation and the arts.

The Arc has a network of over 700 chapters across the country promoting and protecting the human rights of people with I/DD and actively supporting their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes and without regard to diagnosis.

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